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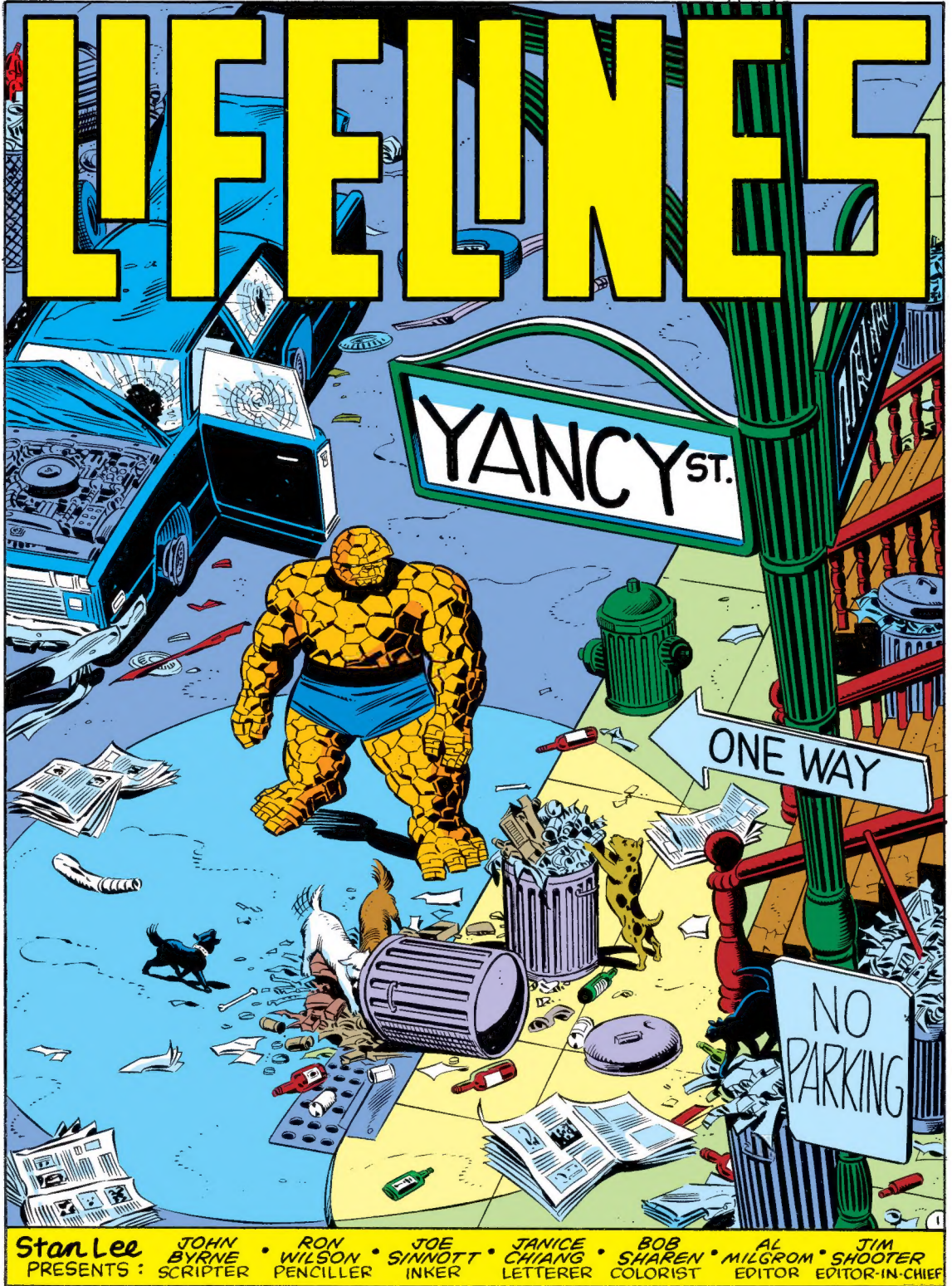
MARVEL® COMICS GROUP



THE THING

1ST
COLLECTOR'S
ITEM ISSUE



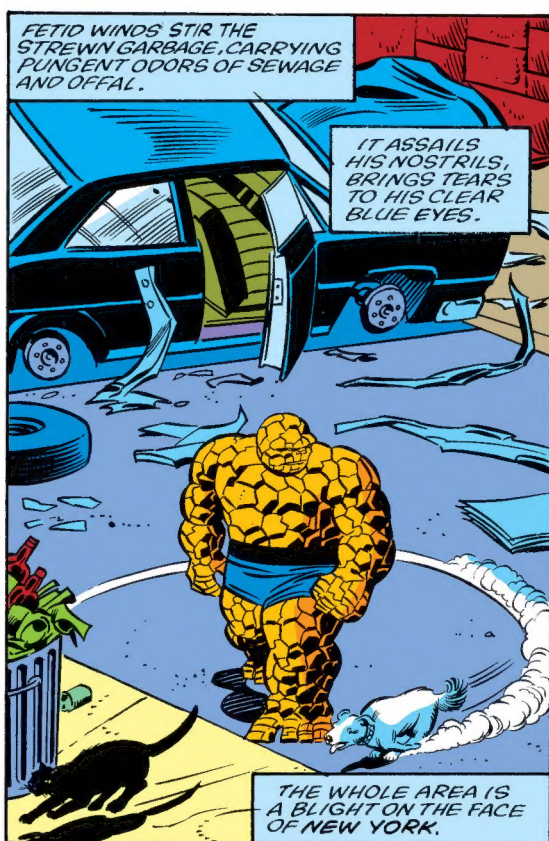




SMELL IT.

THE POLITE PHRASE IS
"URBAN DECAY."

BEN GRIMM--THE
THING--KNOWS IT BY
OTHER NAMES. THIS
NEIGHBORHOOD IS
DEAD AND ROTTING.



FETID WINDS STIR THE
STREWN GARBAGE, CARRYING
PUNGENT ODORS OF SEWAGE
AND OFFAL.

IT ASSAILS
HIS NOSTRILS,
BRINGS TEARS
TO HIS CLEAR
BLUE EYES.

THE WHOLE AREA IS
A BLIGHT ON THE FACE
OF NEW YORK.



BUT IT IS ALSO
SOMETHING ELSE...

THIS
IS IT...



THIS IS HOME.

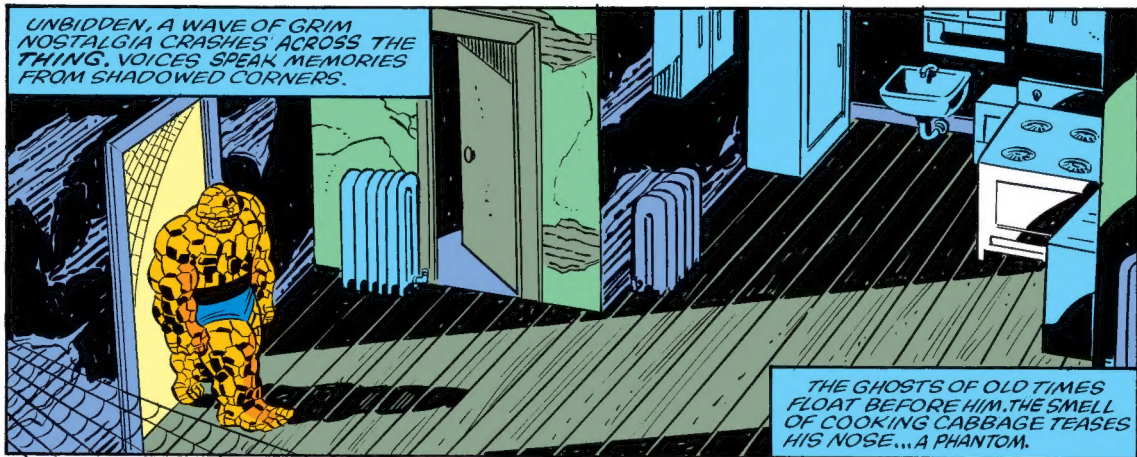
THE OL'
HOMESTEAD.
I BARELY
RECOGNIZE IT.

THIS NEIGHBORHOOD
WAS ALWAYS ROUGH,
BUT THIS...



IT CAN'T BE ALL
THAT LONG SINCE
I WUZ HERE,
CAN IT?

HOW COULD
THINGS HAVE
GOT SO BAD
SO FAST?



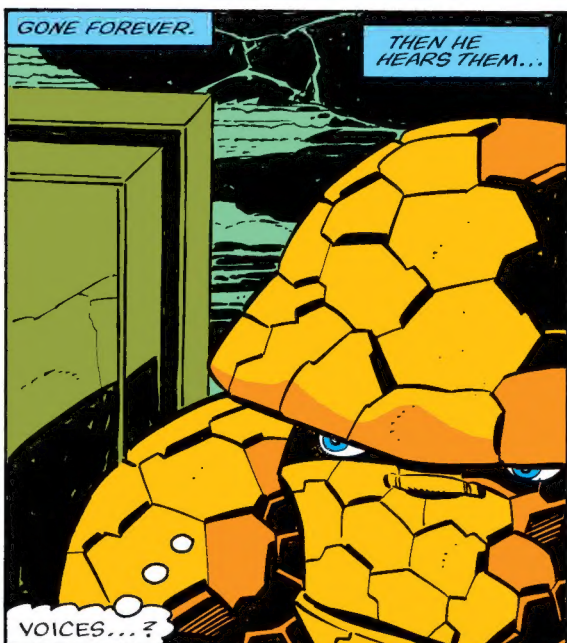
UNBIDDEN, A WAVE OF GRIM NOSTALGIA CRASHES ACROSS THE THING. VOICES SPEAK MEMORIES FROM SHADOWED CORNERS.

THE GHOSTS OF OLD TIMES FLOAT BEFORE HIM. THE SMELL OF COOKING CABBAGE TEASES HIS NOSE... A PHANTOM.



NO ONE LIVES HERE NOW.

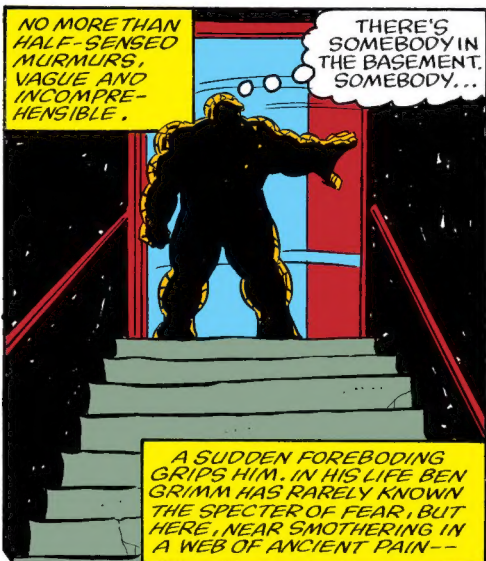
THE CRACKED AND PEELING WALLS ARE AS DRY AND DEAD AS THE MEMORIES THEY EVOKE. THIS PART OF HIS LIFE IS GONE.



GONE FOREVER.

THEN HE HEARS THEM...

VOICES...?



NO MORE THAN HALF-SENSED MURMURS, VAGUE AND INCOMPREHENSIBLE.

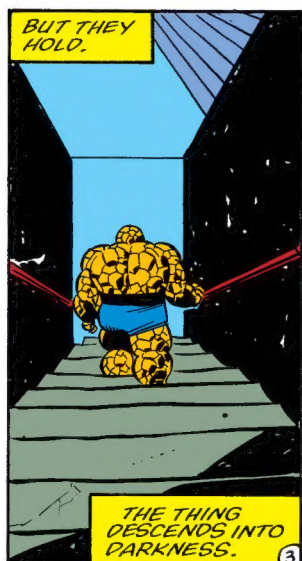
THERE'S SOMEBODY IN THE BASEMENT. SOMEBODY...

A SUDDEN FOREBODING GRIPS HIM. IN HIS LIFE BEN GRIMM HAS RARELY KNOWN THE SPECTER OF FEAR, BUT HERE, NEAR SMOOTHERING IN A WEB OF ANCIENT PAIN--



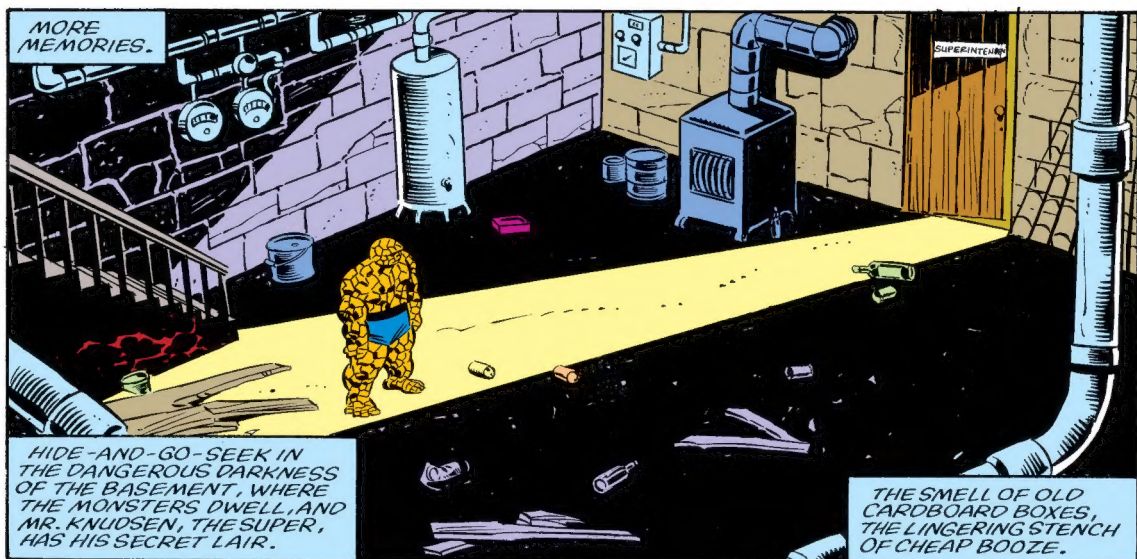
-- THE GHOSTS SEEM SUDDENLY VERY REAL.

THE WOODEN STEPS CREAK IN PAINFUL PROTEST UNDER HIS FOUR HUNDRED POUNDS...



BUT THEY HOLD.

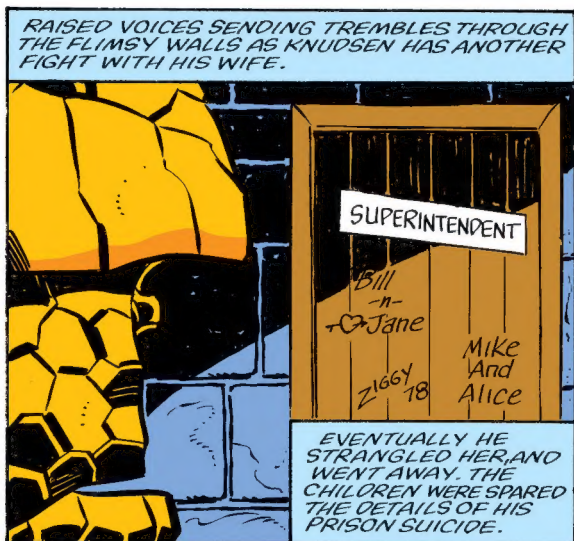
THE THING DESCENDS INTO DARKNESS.



MORE MEMORIES.

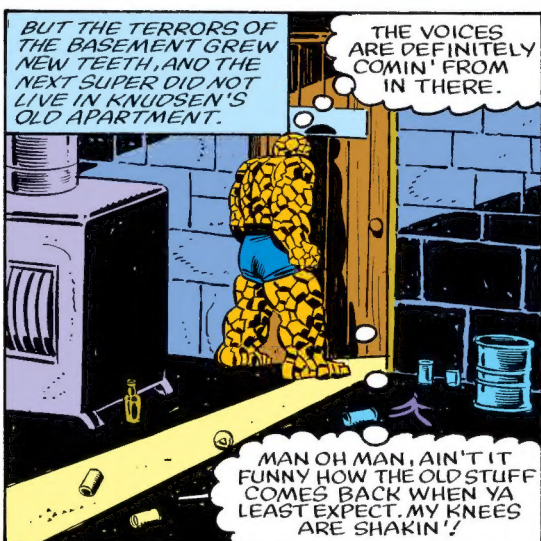
HIDE-AND-GO-SEEK IN THE DANGEROUS DARKNESS OF THE BASEMENT, WHERE THE MONSTERS DWELL, AND MR. KNUDSEN, THE SUPER, HAS HIS SECRET LAIR.

THE SMELL OF OLD CARDBOARD BOXES, THE LINGERING STENCH OF CHEAP BOOZE.



RAISED VOICES SENDING TREMBLES THROUGH THE FLIMSY WALLS AS KNUDSEN HAS ANOTHER FIGHT WITH HIS WIFE.

EVENTUALLY HE STRANGLED HER, AND WENT AWAY. THE CHILDREN WERE SPARED THE DETAILS OF HIS PRISON SUICIDE.



BUT THE TERRORS OF THE BASEMENT GREW NEW TEETH, AND THE NEXT SUPER DID NOT LIVE IN KNUDSEN'S OLD APARTMENT.

THE VOICES ARE DEFINITELY COMIN' FROM IN THERE.

MAN OH MAN, AIN'T IT FUNNY HOW THE OLD STUFF COMES BACK WHEN YA LEAST EXPECT. MY KNEES ARE SHAKIN'!



BUT THESE ARE NOT THE LONG-DEAD VOICES OF MURDERER AND VICTIM.

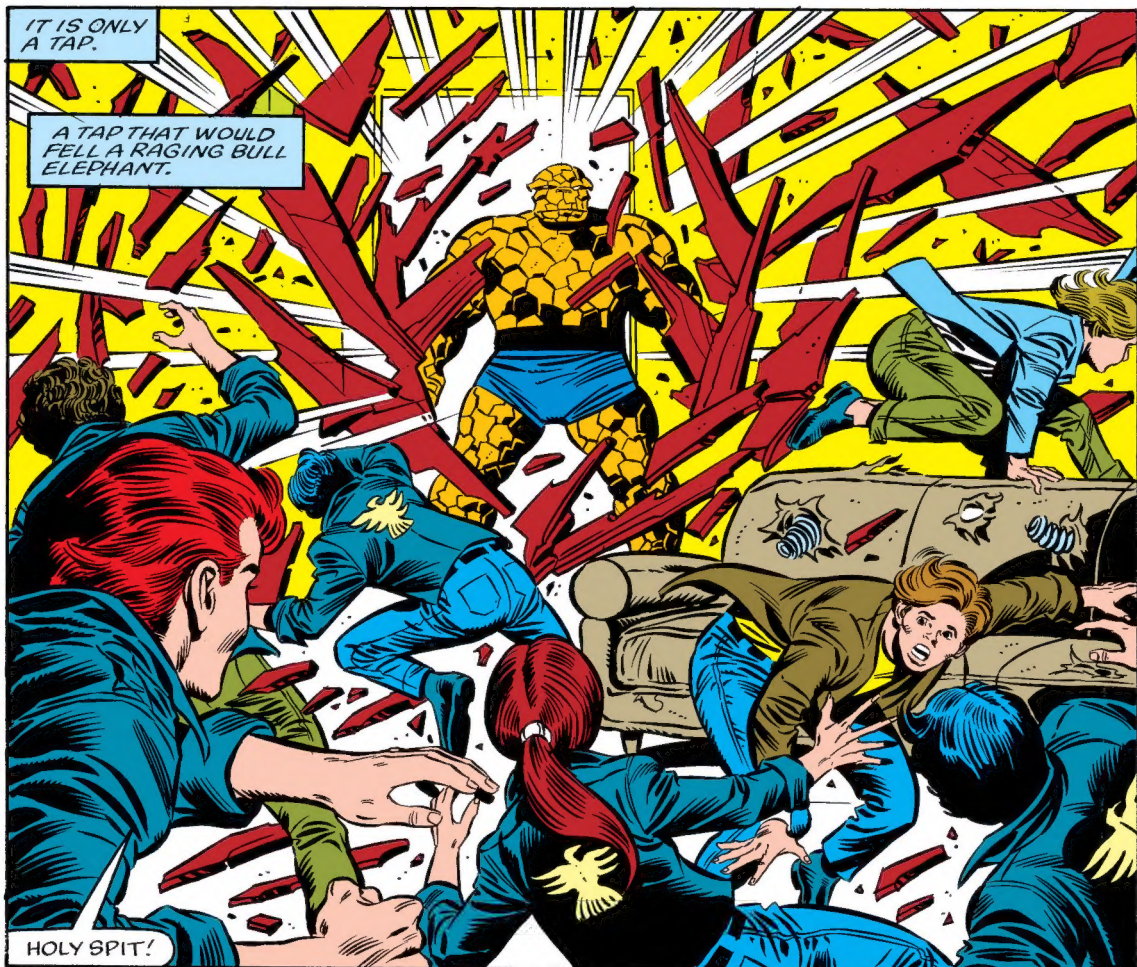


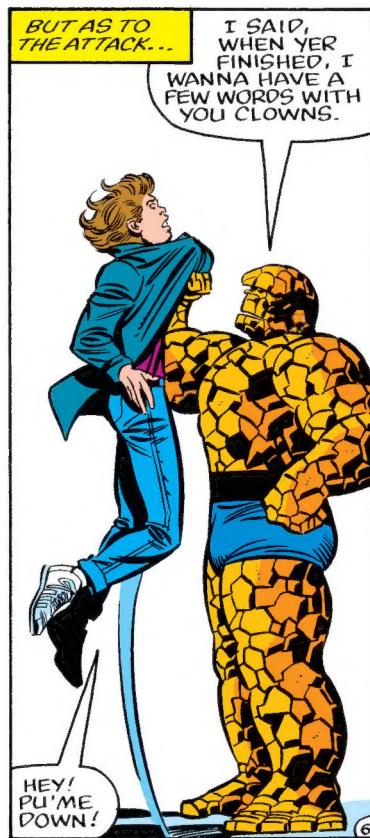
THEY ARE YOUNG AND THEY ARE ANGRY.

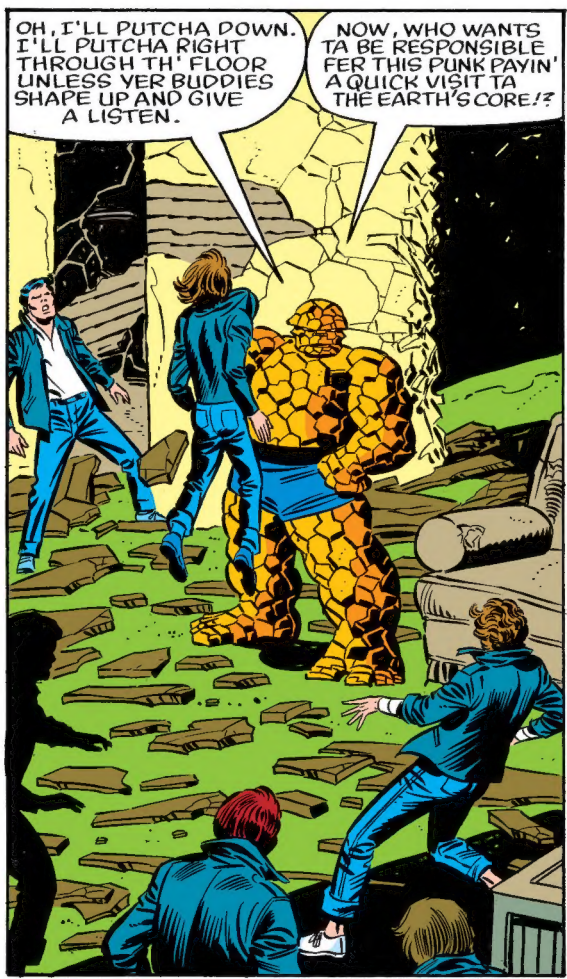
THIS IS THE PLACE AWRIGHT. GUESS I SHOULD MAKE MY ENTRANCE...



ONLY, A LITTLE MORE DRAMATICALLY, I THINK...







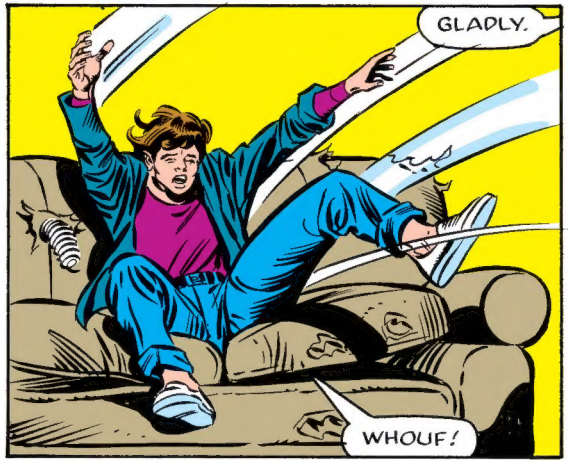
OH, I'LL PUTCHA DOWN. I'LL PUTCHA RIGHT THROUGH TH' FLOOR UNLESS YER BUDDIES SHAPE UP AND GIVE A LISTEN.

NOW, WHO WANTS TA BE RESPONSIBLE FER THIS PUNK PAYIN' A QUICK VISIT TA THE EARTH'S CORE!??



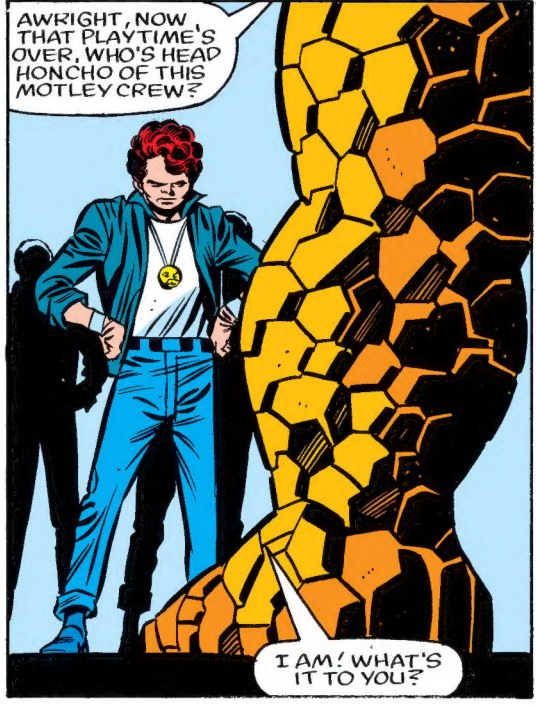
AWRIGHT, AWRIGHT!

LETTIM GO!



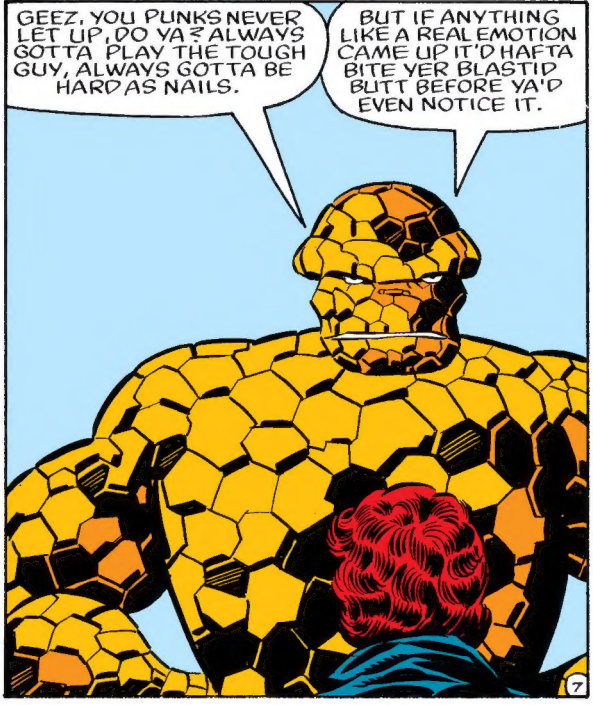
GLADLY.

WHOUF!



AWRIGHT, NOW THAT PLAYTIME'S OVER, WHO'S HEAD HONCHO OF THIS MOTLEY CREW?

I AM! WHAT'S IT TO YOU?



GEEZ, YOU PUNKS NEVER LET UP, DO YA? ALWAYS GOTTA PLAY THE TOUGH GUY, ALWAYS GOTTA BE HARD AS NAILS.

BUT IF ANYTHING LIKE A REAL EMOTION CAME UP IT'D HAFTA BITE YER BLASTID BUTT BEFORE YA'D EVEN NOTICE IT.

DON'T LAY YER FANCY TALK ON US, SUPER-HERO. THEM WORDS MAY MEAN SOMETHING WHEN YA GOT A FULL BELLY AN' LOTSA BUCKS, BUT DOWN HERE THEY'RE JUST CHICKEN-SPIT.

NOW YOU LISTEN...

WHY 'N' CHA FLY ON BACK T'YER RITZY PAD IN THE BAXTER BUILDIN'. MAYBE THE EARTH NEEDS SAVIN' AGAIN. MAYBE SOME BIG BAD SUPER-VILLAIN'S LOOKING TA GIVE YA A KICK IN TH' PANTS.

SAVE IT, PAL. WE ONLY LISTEN TO OUR OWN KIND, SEEZ AND YOU AIN'T ONE OF US. SOMETIMES I DON'T BELIEVE YA EVER WERE.

THE SMILE IS INSOLENT, DRIVING A COLD WEDGE INTO BEN GRIMM'S HEART. THE FLOOD-TIDE OF MEMORY PEAKS AND THREATENS TO WASH HIM AWAY.

FOR A LONG, TENSE MOMENT, THERE IS SILENCE IN MR. KNUDSEN'S OLD FLAT. THE THING FIGHTS DOWN UNWANTED EMOTION.

THEN -

PUNK, I'VE PINCHED OFF GUYS HEADS FER LESS THAN THAT. AN' THAT WAS BEFORETH' COSMIC RAYS TURNED ME INTO A ROCKY ORANGE MONSTER.

DON'T SING YER SAD SONGS TA ME. I WUZ BORN IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD. I KNOW ALL ABOUT IT. I...

WHY DON'T YOU JUST BLOW AWAY, UGLYZ YOU GOT NOTHING TO SAY TO US.

THERE AIN'T NOTHING WE WANNA HEAR FROM TRAITORS.

...WHAT...?

YOU HEARD ME, BLUE EYES.
YER A TRAITOR. YOU AN'
ALL THEM OTHER FANCY-
PANTS DO-GOODERS THAT
QUIT YANCY STREET--THAT
BETRAYED TH' CODE.

THE WORDS SEND ICICLES
THROUGH BEN GRIMM'S
BLOOD. SO FAMILIAR, SO
TERRIBLY, DREADFULLY
FAMILIAR.

THE YOUTH'S EYES
BURN INTO HIS, AND
FIFTEEN YEARS OF
PAIN AND ANGUISH
SEETH BEHIND
THOSE EYES. SO
SHORT A TIME; SO
LONG A LIFETIME.

DEEP WITHIN THE THING,
THE LONG-LOCKED DOOR
SWINGS OPEN. THE HIDDEN
DEMONS STALK AGAIN
THE CORRIDORS OF HIS
MIND. HE FIGHTS AGAINST
STINGING TEARS.

BUT WHEN
HE FINDS
HIS VOICE...

IT IS AS ROCK-HARD
AND STEADY AS HIS OWN
UNYIELDING HIDE...

OKAY, PUNKS, GRAB
SOME UPHOLSTERY. I'M
GONNA TELL YA A
LITTLE STORY...

"YA THINK YOU'VE ALL GOT IT SO HARD AN' ' ROUGH HERE, DON'TCHA? WELL YOU AIN'T THE ONLY ONE'S WHO EVER GREW UP WITHOUT ENOUGH FOOD IN YER BELLY, OR WEARIN' THIRD TIME HAND-ME-DOWNS."



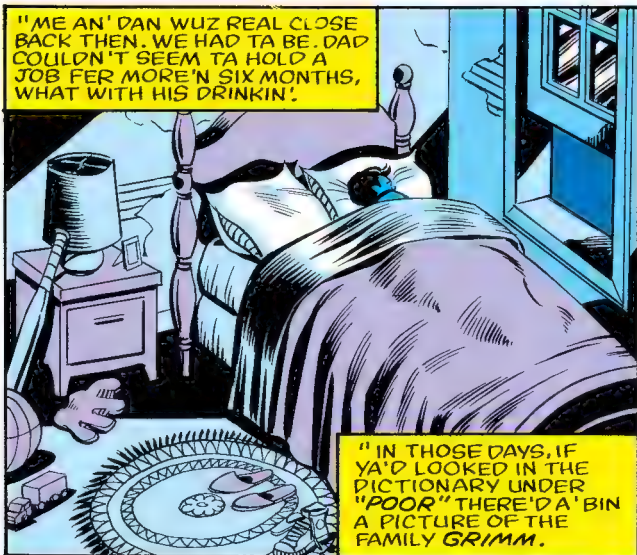
"I GREW UP ON THIS STREET. RIGHT HERE IN THIS BUILDIN'. AND LIFE WAS NO SWEETER THEN..."



"MY BIG BROTHER, DANIEL JACOB GRIMM. BOY, I USED 'TA THINK THE SUN SHONE OUTTA HIS BELLY BUTTON."



"ME AN' DAN WUZ REAL CLOSE BACK THEN. WE HAD TA BE. DAD COULDN'T SEEM TA HOLD A JOB FER MORE'N SIX MONTHS, WHAT WITH HIS DRINKIN'!



"IN THOSE DAYS, IF YA'D LOOKED IN THE DICTIONARY UNDER "POOR" THERE'D A BIN A PICTURE OF THE FAMILY GRIMM.

"AN' DAN AN' MY DAD-- THEY WUZ ALWAYS FIGHTIN'!



THEN, ONE NIGHT...

YOU JUST HOLD YER NOISE, PUNK.



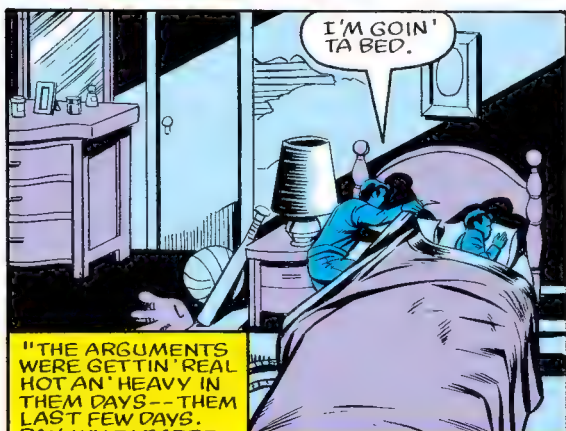
PUNK? PUNK?! DON'T YOU PUNK ME, YA CRUMMY, NO-GOOD BUM! AT LEAST I'M BRINGIN' MONEY INTO THIS DUMP!

DAN... PLEASE...



AW, HANG IT UP, MAW. AIN'T NOthin' EVER GONNA CHANGE AROUND THIS DUMP. NOthin'.

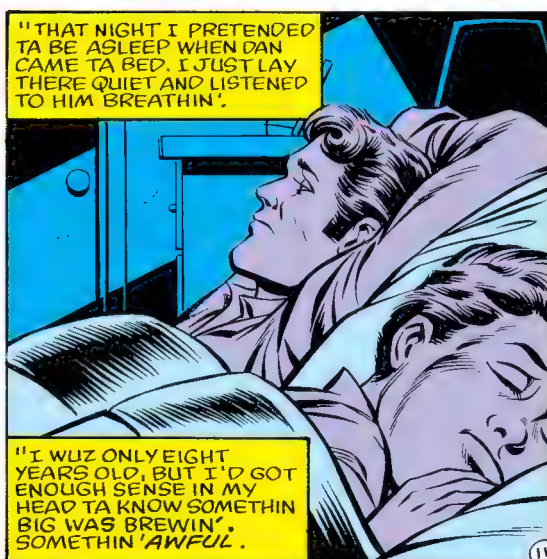
I'M GOIN' TA BED.



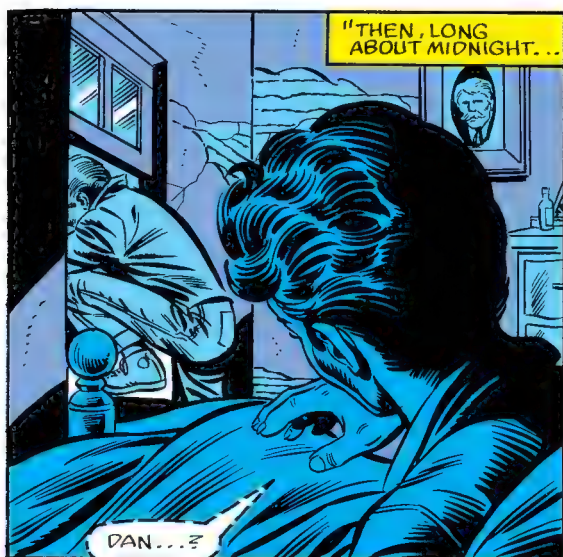
"THE ARGUMENTS WERE GETTIN' REAL HOT AN' HEAVY IN THEM DAYS-- THEM LAST FEW DAYS. DAN WUZ LEADER OF THE YANCY STREET GANG THEN, AN' DAD KNEW ANY MONEY HE MIGHT BRING IN WUZ PROBABLY STOLEN.

"HE DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH SELF RESPECT TA FILL A THIMBLE, MY DAD, BUT HE KNEW WRONG. HE KNEW GANGS WERE WRONG.

"THAT NIGHT I PRETENDED TA BE ASLEEP WHEN DAN CAME TA BED. I JUST LAY THERE QUIET AND LISTENED TO HIM BREATHIN'.

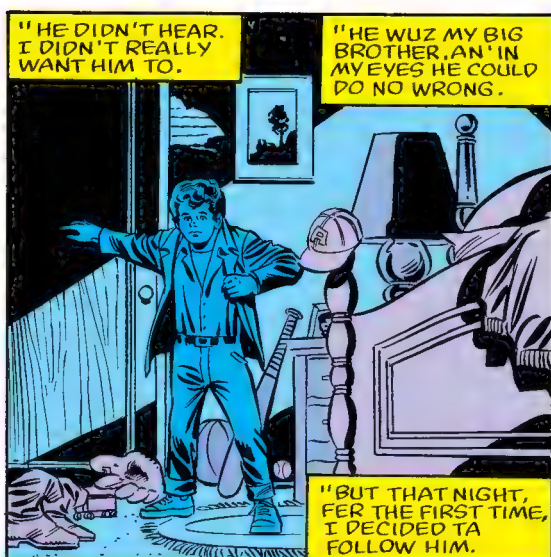


"I WUZ ONLY EIGHT YEARS OLD, BUT I'D GOT ENOUGH SENSE IN MY HEAD TA KNOW SOMETHIN BIG WAS BREWIN'. SOMETHIN' AWFUL.



"THEN, LONG ABOUT MIDNIGHT. ...

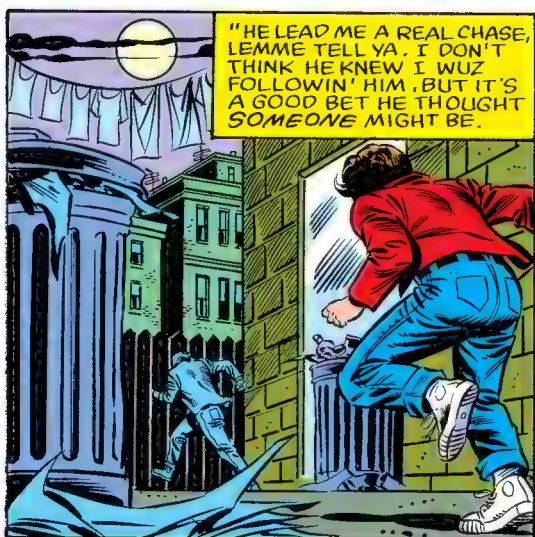
DAN...?



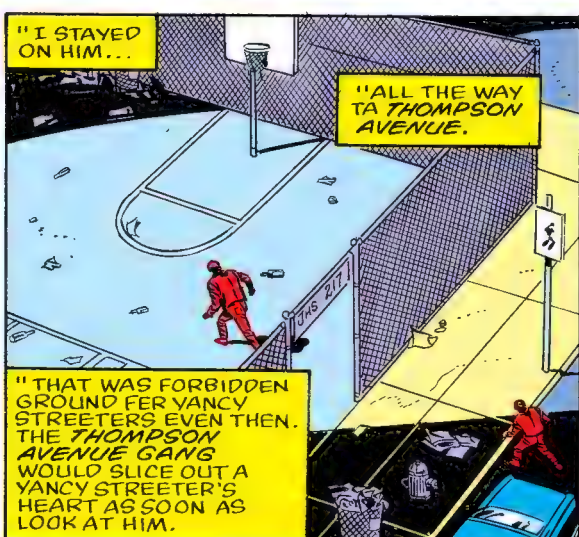
"HE DIDN'T HEAR. I DIDN'T REALLY WANT HIM TO.

"HE WUZ MY BIG BROTHER, AN' IN MY EYES HE COULD DO NO WRONG.

"BUT THAT NIGHT, FER THE FIRST TIME, I DECIDED TA FOLLOW HIM.



"HE LEAD ME A REAL CHASE, LEMME TELL YA. I DON'T THINK HE KNEW I WUZ FOLLOWIN' HIM, BUT IT'S A GOOD BET HE THOUGHT SOMEONE MIGHT BE.



"I STAYED ON HIM...

"ALL THE WAY TA THOMPSON AVENUE.

"THAT WAS FORBIDDEN GROUND FER YANCY STREETERS EVEN THEN. THE THOMPSON AVENUE GANG WOULD SLICE OUT A YANCY STREETER'S HEART AS SOON AS LOOK AT HIM.



"I WUZ SCARED, MORE SCARED THAN I'D EVER BIN IN MY LIFE.

"BUT NOT NEARLY AS SCARED AS I WUZ GONNA BE.

"IN MY DAY WE CALLED IT A RUMBLE."

"GANG WARFARE. PURE, BLOODY-MANDAG MAYHEM. NO BLACK AGAINST WHITE, NO RICH AGAINST POOR. JUST A BUNCHA PUNK KIDS WHO'D GOT SO LITTLE TA LOSE, WHO'D BEEN PUSHED TO THE WALL SO MUCH, THEY JUST HAD TA LASH OUT."

"AN' SO THEY LASHED OUT AT EACH OTHER. AT THE OTHER POOR PUNKS WITH THE SAME EMPTY GUTS AN' RAGGED HAND-ME-DOWNS."

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"AN' SO THEY LASHED OUT AT EACH OTHER. AT THE OTHER POOR PUNKS WITH THE SAME EMPTY GUTS AN' RAGGED HAND-ME-DOWNS."


"AN' THEN IT HAPPENED.

"I'VE SEEN DEATH A LOTTA TIMES SINCE THEN, SEEN IT FAST, SEEN IT SLOW.

"AN' THEN IT HAPPENED.


"I'VE SEEN DEATH A LOTTA TIMES SINCE THEN, SEEN IT FAST, SEEN IT SLOW.

"BUT THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D EVER SEEN ANYONE DIE."



"ONE SECOND HE WUZ DAN GRIMM, MORE ALIVE THAN ANYONE I'D EVER KNOWN."

"BUT THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D EVER SEEN ANYONE DIE."



"ONE SECOND HE WUZ DAN GRIMM, MORE ALIVE THAN ANYONE I'D EVER KNOWN."

"TH' NEXT SECOND HE WUZ A HUNDRED AND FORTY POUNDS OF NOTHIN'! IT WAS JUST THAT QUICK.

DAN!
NO!
NO!

13

"TH' NEXT SECOND HE WUZ A HUNDRED AND FORTY POUNDS OF NOTHIN'! IT WAS JUST THAT QUICK.

DAN!
NO!
NO!

13

"DEATH HAD NEVER BEEN REAL TA ME BEFORE THAT MOMENT."

"OH, I REMEMBER MY MOTHER CRYIN' WHEN SHE GOT THE LETTER FROM THE OLD COUNTRY, SAYIN' HER OWN MOTHER HAD PASSED ON. BUT THAT WUZ WORDS ON PAPER. JUST WORDS ABOUT SOMEONE I'D NEVER MET."

"THIS WUZ REAL. THIS WUZ DAN."

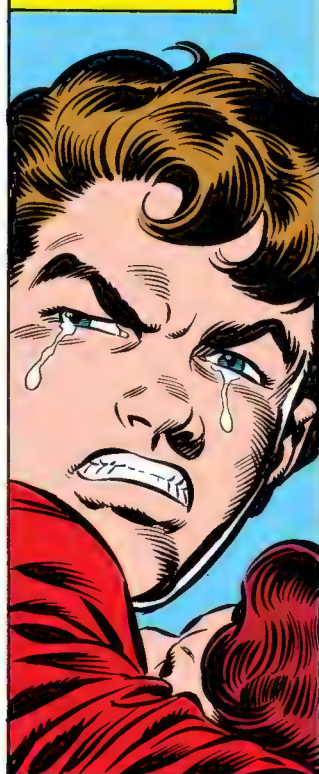


"I SWORE, THEN, I CUSSED ALOUD FER THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE. I CUSSED YANCY STREET, I CUSSED THOMPSON AVENUE. I CUSSED AGAINST MY DAD."



"I EVEN CUSSED AT GOD."

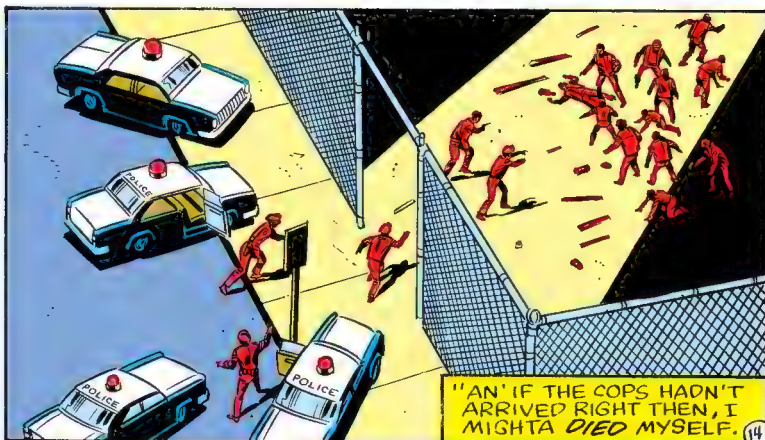
"AN' WHEN I WAS FINISHED..."



"I DID THE ONE THING I KNOW NOW DAN WOULD NEVER HAVE WANTED ME TA DO."

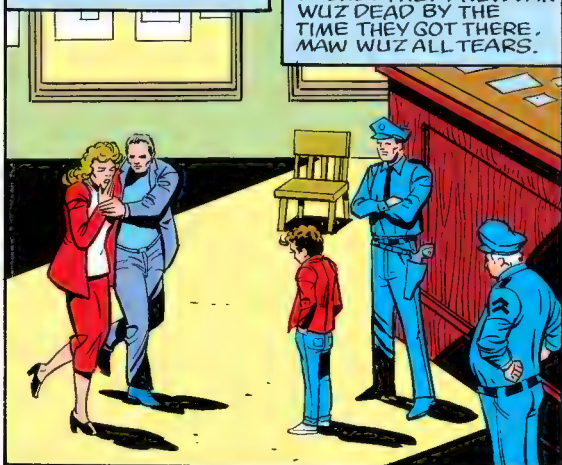


"I FOUGHT."



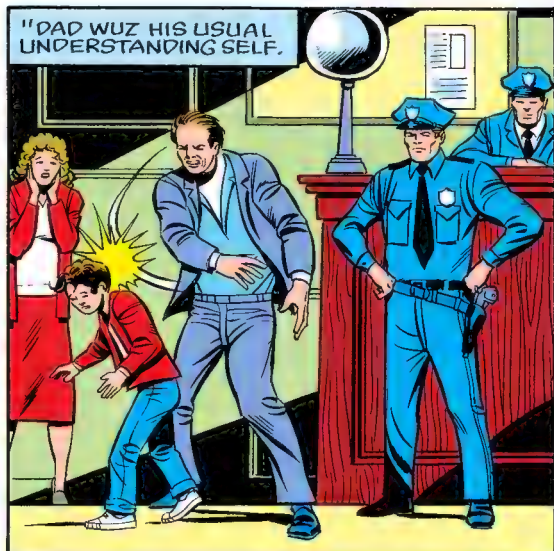
"AN' IF THE COPS HADN'T ARRIVED RIGHT THEN, I MIGHTA DIED MYSELF."

"MOST OF THE GANGS
GOT AWAY, SCURRYIN'
INTA HIDEY-HOLES
LIKE RATS. I DIDN'T."



"THE COPS TOOK ME
DOWN TA TH 'PRECINCT
HOUSE AN' CALLED MY
FOLKS. THEY KNEW DAN
WUZ DEAD BY THE
TIME THEY GOT THERE.
MAW WUZ ALL TEARS."

"DAD WUZ HIS USUAL
UNDERSTANDING SELF."



"THAT NIGHT WAS
STILL WITH ME, STILL
IN MY NIGHTMARES
TEN YEARS LATER."



"BY THEN I WUZ
THE HEAD OF TH'
YANCY STREET
GANG. ALL OF DAN'S
OL' PALS WERE
EITHER DEAD OR IN
JAIL. WE WERE NEW.
WE WERE TOUGH."

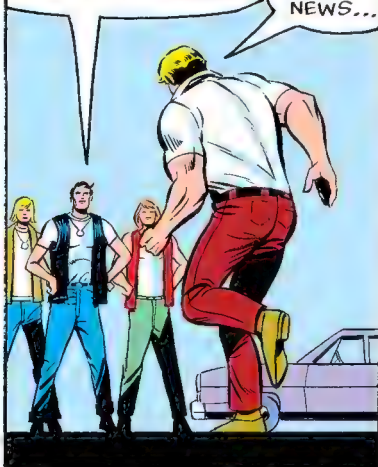


"THEN, ONE DAY..."

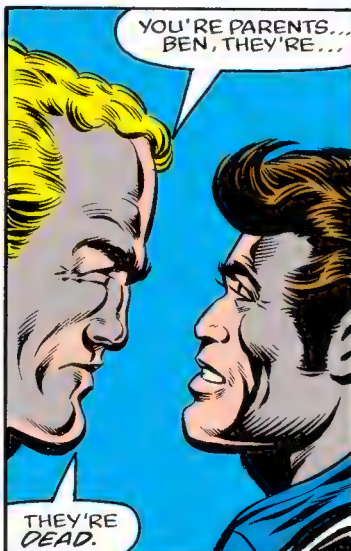
UNCLE JAKE?

WHAT'RE YOU
DOIN' HERE, MISTER?
THIS AIN'T YER TURF
NO MORE, REMEMBER?

BEN...
I HAVE
SOME
BAD
NEWS...

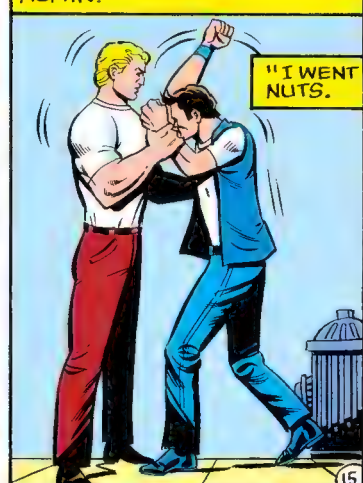


YOU'RE PARENTS...
BEN, THEY'RE...

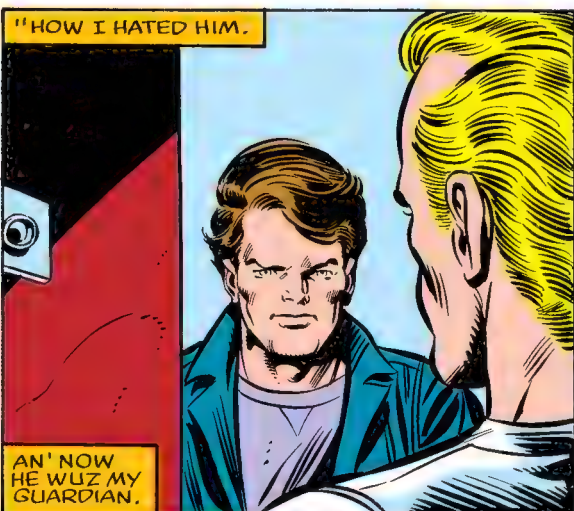
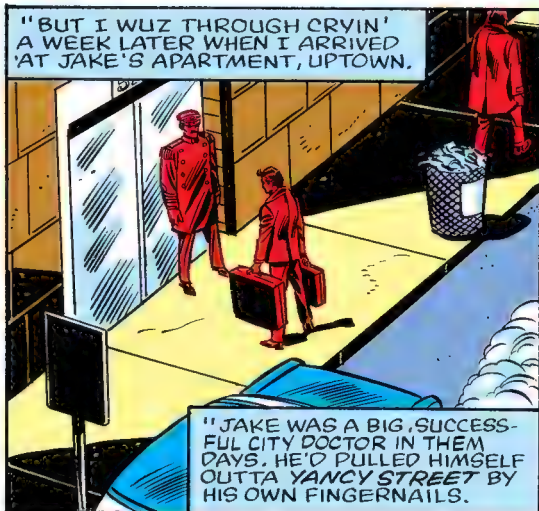
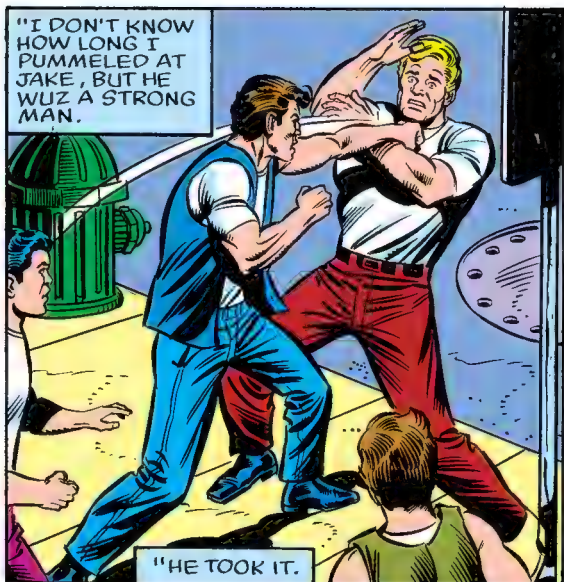


THEY'RE
DEAD.

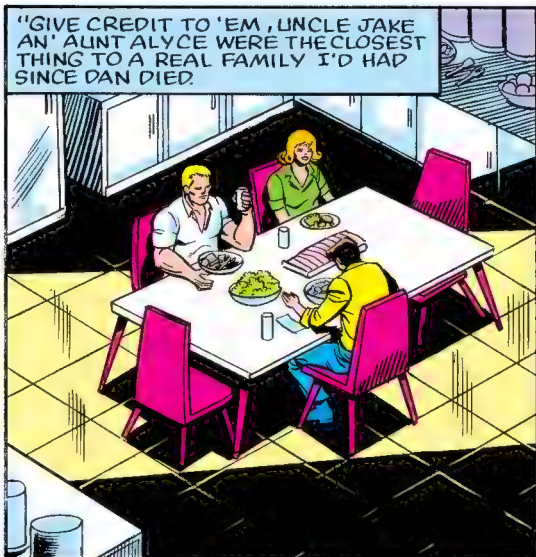
"WHAT CAN I SAY? IT WAS
THE NIGHT DAN DIED ALL OVER
AGAIN."



"I WENT
NUTS."



"GIVE CREDIT TO 'EM, UNCLE JAKE AN' ALINT ALYCE WERE THE CLOSEST THING TO A REAL FAMILY I'D HAD SINCE DAN DIED.



"OR THEY WOULD'VE BIN IF MY STUPID, SENSELESS PRIDE HADN'T KEPT GETTIN' IN TH' WAY.



"BUT THEY KEPT AT ME. THEY KEPT GIVIN' ME STUFF, THE GOOD LIFE.



"AND, NO MATTER HOW ROTTEN I TREATED THEM, THEY KEPT GIVIN' ME LOVE.

AN' FINALLY I STARTED TO STRAIGHTEN OUT.



"THEY GOT ME INTO HIGH SCHOOL. I DISCOVERED EDUCATION WUZN'T SUCH A BAD THING.



"AN' I DISCOVERED FOOTBALL.



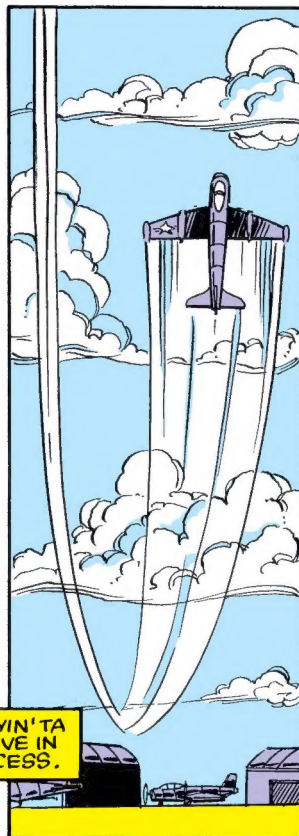
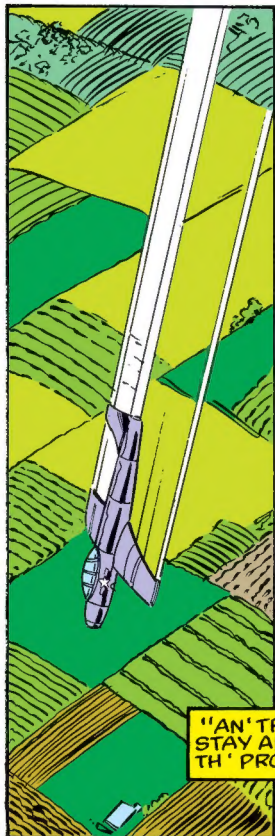
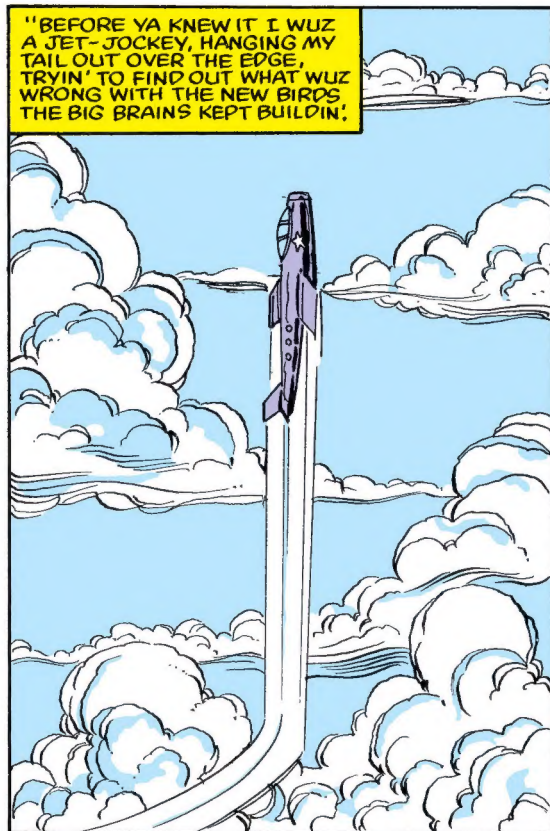
"THERE WUZ STILL A LOT OF ANGER INSIDE ME, THE DEATH OF DAN, THE DEATH OF MY FOLKS.

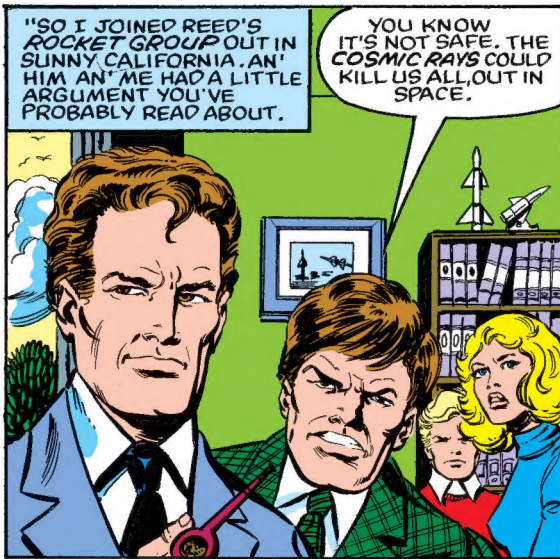


"FOOTBALL GAVE ME A RELEASE.



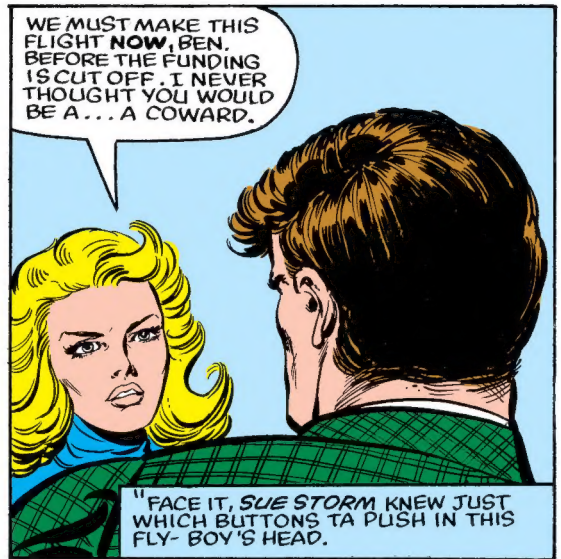






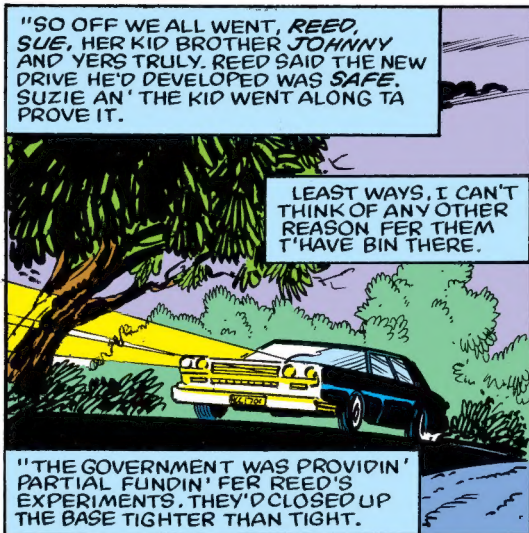
"SO I JOINED REED'S ROCKET GROUP OUT IN SUNNY CALIFORNIA. AN' HIM AN' ME HAD A LITTLE ARGUMENT YOU'VE PROBABLY READ ABOUT.

YOU KNOW IT'S NOT SAFE. THE COSMIC RAYS COULD KILL US ALL, OUT IN SPACE.



WE MUST MAKE THIS FLIGHT NOW, BEN. BEFORE THE FUNDING IS CUT OFF. I NEVER THOUGHT YOU WOULD BE A... A COWARD.

"FACE IT, SUE STORM KNEW JUST WHICH BUTTONS TO PUSH IN THIS FLY-BOY'S HEAD.



"SO OFF WE ALL WENT, REED, SUE, HER KID BROTHER JOHNNY AND YERS TRULY. REED SAID THE NEW DRIVE HE'D DEVELOPED WAS SAFE. SUZIE AN' THE KID WENT ALONG TA PROVE IT.

LEAST WAYS, I CAN'T THINK OF ANY OTHER REASON FER THEM T'HAVE BIN THERE.

"THE GOVERNMENT WAS PROVIDIN' PARTIAL FUNDIN' FER REED'S EXPERIMENTS. THEY'D CLOSED UP THE BASE TIGHTER THAN TIGHT.



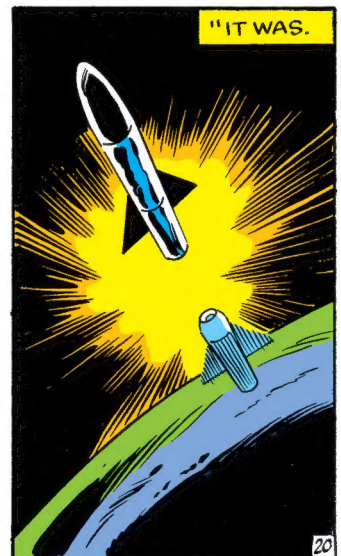
"BUT REED HAD PRACTICALLY BUILT THE WHOLE PLACE WITH HIS OWN TWO HANDS. HE KNEW A WAY PAST THE GUARDS.



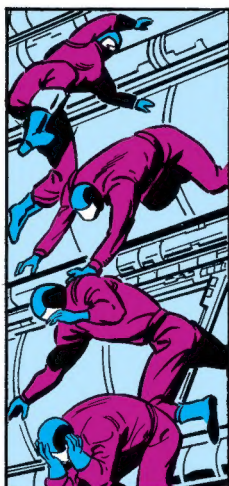
"BLASTED OFF...



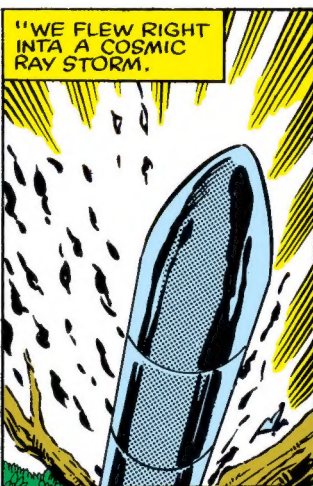
"AN' SET OFF ON WHAT WE THOUGHT WOULD BE SOME KINDA HISTORIC FLIGHT.



"IT WAS.



"BUT NOT QUITE THE WAY WE'D EXPECTED."



"WE FLEW RIGHT INTO A COSMIC RAY STORM."

"WE CRASHED BACK TO EARTH, LUCKY TA BE ALIVE."



"BUT WE WUZ MORE THAN ALIVE."

"WE WUZ THE FANTASTIC FOUR!"



YOU SING A GOOD SONG, TOUGH GUY.



BLIT WHAT YOU SAY DON'T CHANGE NOTHIN'. IT DON'T CHANGE NOTHIN' AT ALL.



YOU STILL SOLD-OUT, SUPER-HERO. YOU LEFT YANCY STREET. YOU LEFT THE LIFE. YOU BROKE THE ODDS.

ANYBODY CAN MAKE IT OUT THERE, IN THE SOFT LIFE.



THE TRICK IS TA STAY HERE. STAY RIGHT HERE. AN' MAKE IT! AN' SURVIVE.

